Bicycling and walking in the Southeast USA: Why is it rare and risky?

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Highlights

- We ask why biking and walking are less prevalent and less safe in the Deep South.
- We find that urban areas are less dense in the Deep South than other regions.
- Rural areas are more dense in the Deep South than other regions.
- Historical patterns of urbanization also play a role.
- Other factors include state and local policies, infrastructure, and funding.
Abstract

Although the Southeast USA region of the United States has warm weather and relatively flat terrain, bicycling and walking for transportation are less prevalent in the region than in the rest of the United States. Moreover, these modes have higher rates of traffic crashes and fatalities in the Southeast USA than elsewhere. We examine factors that may contribute to this outcome, including urban sprawl, historical development patterns, policies, goals, legislation, infrastructure, and funding for active transportation. We find that the Southeast USA has undergone population growth following a distinct pattern, resulting in denser population in rural areas, and less dense population in urban areas, than the rest of the nation. Over the long term, the Southeast USA underwent a specific pattern of growth between 1940 and 1980 (the heyday of automobile-oriented development): the region transitioned from mostly rural to slightly over half urban, in terms of population. State and local policies and funding also play a role in the current status of active transportation in the Southeast USA. We conclude that while some emerging trends are promising, such as the adoption of Complete Streets policies, the Southeast USA faces unique challenges due to the patterns by which development has occurred there.

Keywords
Bicycling; Walking; Southeast USA; Transportation; Health; Safety
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